



NRC NEWS

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone 301/415-820

Washington, DC 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: www.nrc.gov

No. S-03-016

REMARKS

BY

NILS J. DIAZ, CHAIRMAN
U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

AT THE
ALL EMPLOYEES MEETING

MORNING SESSION
10:30 A.M. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2003
PLAZA AREA, WHITE FLINT COMPLEX

Good morning, and welcome to the NRC's annual All Employees Meeting. Joining me this morning on the platform are my colleagues Edward McGaffigan and Jeffrey Merrifield. As you heard, Commissioner Greta Dicus is on official travel and will not be joining us today.

On behalf of the Commission, let me also welcome to this meeting those members of our staff who are located in the NRC Regional Offices, at the Technical Training Center in Chattanooga, and at remote sites throughout the country. You are an integral and highly valued part of this agency, notwithstanding your distance from your colleagues here at headquarters, and we look forward to your active participation in this session and the one that will follow this afternoon.

Today's meeting brings to mind three issues that are of special interest to me: communications, regulatory reforms, and homeland preparedness. I believe this is

the 12th All Employees Meeting that the agency has held since the concept of an agency-wide meeting with the Commission intending to improve internal communications with the staff was first floated by one of my predecessors as Chairman, Dr. Ivan Selin. His idea was that such a meeting would be the most efficient way to explain to a concerned NRC staff the direction he planned to lead the agency and what his views on regulation and nuclear energy actually were. By most accounts, that first agency-wide meeting was, no pun intended, an electrifying experience as the NRC staff discovered that they could ask the Chairman and the Commission any question they wanted and receive an answer on the spot. Well, maybe not any question! Although the novelty of that first meeting has since worn off, the Commission has continued the practice because it has proven to be an important and effective tool for direct, two-way communication between the Commission and agency employees. My fellow Commissioners and I also hold “open doors” for your special concerns. One of the important lessons we have learned over the past decade is that effective internal agency communication is essential for improving our performance as a regulatory body. So I invite all of you to take advantage of the opportunity this meeting provides to express your interests or concerns in the form of questions, and we will do our best to respond to them, subject only to the usual limitations. Of course, I cannot promise you the novelty that marked the first All-Employees meeting -- my Commission colleagues and I have attended all but three or four of all the All-Employees Meetings ever held, so you know us better than any other Members of the Commission who have ever served in the entire history of the agency. Since most paths are two ways, we also know you well. That fact, I hope, will further encourage you to take an active part in these sessions -- we are, after all, “known materials” given our long, continuous association in the business of nuclear regulation and protection of the public health and safety.

The second theme that this meeting brings to mind is also a favorite of mine -- more safety-focused, less prescriptive, more risk-informed and performance-based regulation. As it so happens, Dr. Selin was also the Chairman who initiated the first concrete steps toward shifting the nuclear regulatory paradigm from the traditional prescriptive to a more risk-oriented approach to regulation by requesting the staff to prepare a report that explored the possibilities of expanded use of PRAs. As one of the agency’s strong advocates of risk-informed regulation throughout my tenure as a Member of the Commission, I am pleased at the progress we have made, yet somewhat taken aback by the amount of time it has taken to get there. We have been steadily pursuing this very basic objective for more than ten years and still have a long way to go. This suggests to me, at least, that despite the progress we have clearly made, the nature of our business is complex and often driven by external events not subject to our control, and it is important to move forward steadily, but occasionally taking big steps. It is incumbent on us to be vigilant, persistent, patient, and committed in pursuit of our

regulatory objectives as well as flexible and creative in responding to new challenges as they arise. I am both confident that we can do so and equally confident that we will have to do so.

One of the most important new challenges that the nation and the NRC face is public concern about homeland preparedness. By homeland preparedness, I mean the integrated coordination of the resources of the nation to prevent, respond to, or mitigate emergencies that would threaten the public health or safety. At the NRC, we usually refer to this issue as emergency preparedness for radiological protection, but present times are adding new dimensions not only to security, but also to emergency preparedness. The Commission believes that rapidly developing accident scenarios in nuclear power plants, whatever the initiator, are covered by the extensive emergency preparedness plans which are in place, and that the significant security improvements we have achieved, plant mitigation strategies, and emergency plans and off-site communications, are all contributors to robust and enhanced protective measures for the public. Yet, emergency preparedness must run deeper, covering the spectrum of radiological risks to our nation. Homeland preparedness is a serious concern for the citizens of the United States; it is an issue to which we are paying increasingly close attention.

Finally, let me return to where I began my remarks -- with the importance of communications. The challenges posed by regulatory reform and homeland preparedness have an important connection to the adequacy of our external communications efforts -- the need to explain clearly and accurately what we are doing and why. Improved communications, in my view, rests on two basic supports -- the need to communicate in clear, factual language without minimizing or exaggerating issues, and the quality of our actions. The actions of strong and active regulators carry a particularly strong message and can significantly enhance public confidence in the NRC.

Of course, a prerequisite to improving our external communications is the ability to communicate effectively within the agency. We all have a role to play in this effort, including the Commission. As I stated earlier, this All-Employees Meeting is part of the overall effort to improve our internal communications. In keeping with that objective, we would now like to turn the meeting over to you so that you may ask the questions you want to ask.